

**STATEMENT TO HOUSING COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN
SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 240**

My name is Paul Schierloh and I am the Associate Director of the Health, Housing & Welfare Department of the City of Danbury. I also serve as a member of the Danbury Housing Partnership and Danbury's Veterans Housing Workgroup. I strongly urge that your committee support Senate Bill 240, "An Act Concerning Housing Assistance For Veterans." We Danburians are proud that this bill has been introduced by Senator Michael McLachlan who as Mayor Mark Boughton's Chief of Staff led Danbury's efforts to establish our comprehensive veterans housing initiative known as "Housing For Heroes." This collaborative effort seeks to address the diverse housing and supportive service needs of veterans by providing a continuum of housing options ranging from emergency housing for homeless veterans to permanent affordable housing for veterans and their families.

The housing needs of veterans were identified as a priority for action in Danbury's Ten-Year Plan To End Homelessness. This is consistent with the findings of other communities in Connecticut who have developed ten-year plans. The VA Connecticut Healthcare system estimates that there are 3,000 to 5,000 homeless veterans in Connecticut based on VA CHALENG data. It is expected that the need for housing and supportive services will increase as veterans return from difficult combat and support duties with physical, emotional and mental health issues related to their experiences. The housing needs of veterans are not limited to those who are homeless. Significant numbers of Connecticut veterans require housing while they pursue job training to transition from the service to a new career or further their education in our State

universities or community colleges. Veterans re-entering the work force in our state need affordable rentals and starter homes. Consideration should also be given to the sacrifices made by our guard and reserve forces that have been called to full-time active duty during our recent conflicts.

The over-riding need of veterans returning to Connecticut is for affordable permanent housing: permanent supportive housing units, affordable rental units and affordable homeownership opportunities. In a challenging fiscal climate, Senate Bill 240 is an innovative and effective way to address the housing needs of veterans without busting the budget by requiring that a fair share of any State-financed affordable housing that is funded be reserved for our veterans. This bill does not create a new housing program or require any significant new funding, but it does ensure that Connecticut's veterans will be benefit from whatever housing programs the State is able to fund from this point forward. Our veterans are used to being team players, and they (as do we) recognize that the housing needs of veterans must be balanced with the needs of others in our State, such as seniors and low-moderate income families. We ask your support for this bill not because it gives an advantage to veterans, but because it gives them a fair shake.

Whatever our personal views on national policies and strategies, we can all agree that Connecticut veterans who have suffered physically or emotionally while in our service deserve not only our thanks but our continued support. We should also recognize that our returning veterans bring home with them vast reserves of dedication, skill, talent and energy that will greatly contribute to communities throughout Connecticut. Senate Bill 240 will help some of these talented people find a home in Connecticut and we urge the committee to take favorable action on it.